

CLAIMS

1. A system for collection and consolidation of information gathered from a plurality of remotely located data providers, the system comprising:

5 a data gathering specification database that specifies the locations of data providers from which data is to be gathered and the data that is to be gathered;

10 an information retriever software coupled to the data gathering specification database and effective for establishing communication with the data providers and for retrieving from the data providers the data to be gathered;

15 a data collector coupled to the information retriever, the data collector including a facility for segregating data records retrieved by the information retriever into data records types and for correlating and consolidating data records received from different data providers according to the data record types;

20 an analyzer and report generator coupled to the data collector for categorizing information according to desired report formats and for creating report records; and

a report generator for creating and providing consolidated reports of data obtained from the data providers.

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2. The system of claim 1, in which the data providers are remotely located web sites of product and/or service vendors.

3. The system of claim 1, in which the data providers have databases accessible via local area networks or wide area networks.

4. The system of claim 1, in which the information retrieved by the information retriever comprises hardware and software inventory data.

5. The system of claim 1, in which the information retriever is capable of operating fully automatically in gathering data, including accessing web sites without manual operator intervention.

6. The system of claim 1, in which the data collector includes a facility that detects changes in data records over time.

7. The system of claim 1, including a facility that gathers data for comparison of purposes, involving the gathering of data from websites which contain information that is not personal to a requestor of the information.

8. The system of claim 1, in which the information retriever retrieves data records by a screen scraping process.

9. The system of claim 1, in which the information retriever retrieves data by the use of software applets made available to a browser facility thereof.

10. The system of claim 1, in which the information retriever retrieves data by downloading the data in XML mark-up form from various web sites.

11. The system of claim 1, in which the information retriever retrieves data that is exported by web sites.

12. The system of claim 1, in which the information retriever includes a learning mode facility that records the steps of logging in and accessing data from various web sites.

13. The system of claim 1, in which the data collector stores information in a database in data records that contain three or more of: part number; SKU; product description; vendor; manufacturer; item type; quantity; cost; purchase date; purchase terms and conditions; serial number; computer location; accounting information;

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contacting person; date and time of last visit; user account information; and method for extracting data.

14. The system of claim 1, in which the system includes a facility that enables specification whether information is to be retrieved periodically, or at user specified times, or continuously.

15. The system of claim 1, in which the data collector includes a facility for resolving ambiguities and inconsistencies in data retrieved by the information retriever.

16. The system of claim 1, including a facility for providing common denominators for data selection.

17. The system of claim 1, including a facility that retrieves and maintains historical data records.

18. The system of claim 1, including a facility that enables a user to set parameters for watching and reporting user specified data items.

19. The system of claim 1, including a facility that reports to the data providers errors or omissions in their data.

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20. The system of claim 1, in which the analyzer and report generator has a facility that prepares reports that are compatible with and transportable to spreadsheet databases.

21. The system of claim 1, including a correlator that is effective for consolidating data with physical inventory data obtained by other systems.

22. The system of claim 1, in which the report generator includes a facility that enables the preparation of presentation data.

23. The system of claim 1, in which the data records for the data providers comprise financial assets of a plurality of individuals.

24. The system of claim 23, in which the financial data records comprise two or more of: asset code; stock symbol; description; account identification; asset type; quantity; cost; purchase date; serial number; and owner.